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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR CONCLUDES SHIPRIDER AGREEMENT WITH TONGA

11. (U) ON May 15, Ambassador McGann, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) District 14 CPT. David Swatland, DAO CMDR Robert Forwood and POL/ECON Chief James Crowe met with Tonga Acting Secretary for Foreign Affairs Viliame Va'inga Tone, Solicitor General 'Asipeli 'Aminiasi Kefu and other government officials in Nuku'alofa to resolve the final questions regarding a shiprider agreement between our countries. The delegations used the draft text proposed by the USG as their working document. Ambassador explained the agreement would allow USCG vessels with Tongan law enforcement officials onboard to conduct maritime security patrols within its EEZ. He also drew upon the success of the ship riders program in Kiribati to describe the potential benefits of the agreement.

12. (U) In an effective use of pre-meetings by CPT. Swatland, most issues regarding the draft text had been satisfactorily addressed. This left only Tongan concerns over the extent of USCG authority while in their EEZ to be discussed at the last session. Swatland explained that the Coast Guard would facilitate Tongan officials their maritime law enforcement priorities, including fisheries protection, counter-narcotics, immigration and trafficking of persons. He eased Tongan concerns by emphasizing that the USCG would not operate unilaterally within Tonga's EEZ. With the agreement of the final text, Acting Secretary Tone and Solicitor General Kefu said they would submit the agreement to Tonga's Cabinet for approval. Tone agreed to forward the final text under cover of a diplomatic note. He underlined that there would be no substantive changes to the text. Tone also agreed to a formal signing ceremony no later than August 2009. Ambassador noted our intention to have District 14 Commander Admiral Manson Brown sign the agreement on behalf of the United States.

13. (U) This will be the sixth shiprider agreement in the region joining Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Kiribati and the Cook Islands. The Tongan agreement successfully completes this phase of our initiative to expand USCG maritime law enforcement authority throughout the Pacific.

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